THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Former External Affairs Minister met Iranian First Vice-President Parviz Dawoodi on 26th October 2005 in Moscow on the sidelines of the Heads of Government Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in which both India and Iran are observers. During the meeting, the state of bilateral relations including trade was discussed. Former EAM expressed India's satisfaction at the ongoing cooperation with Iran in the energy sector. There was also an exchange of views on Iran's nuclear issue.

(c) India and Iran have imparted a strategic dimension to their relations with cooperation covering fields including hydrocarbons, trade, transit, and science and technology cooperation. Bilateral discussions have been formalized through Joint Commission meetings, Strategic dialogue between the two sides and a Joint Working Group on the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline.

American Disagreement On Indo-lran Gas Pipeline Project

955. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that USA showed its disagreement on Indo-lran Pipeline Project;

(b) if so, whether this was taken up by the Prime Minister during his visit to USA with the US President; and

(c) if so, the outcome thereof and if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) The US has shown its concern over the Iran gas pipeline issue. During her visit to India, Secretary of State Dr. Condoleeza Rice stated at a press conference on March 16,2005" I think our views concerning Iran are well-known by this time and we have communicated to the Indian Government our concerns about the gas pipeline cooperation between Iran and India".

(b) and (c) The issue of India-Iran gas pipeline project has not figured in the discussions that Prime Minister has had with the US President. Regarding the Indo-lran gas pipeline Prime Minister has said,"... that's a decision between us and Iran. I don't think outside parties have any role in

that matter." Government would take decisions on the gas pipeline based on India's national interest.

Bilateral Talks During SAARC Summit

956. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister held any bilateral talks with the leaders of neighbouring countries at the sidelines of recently held SAARC Summit at Dhaka; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the outcome of the talks, country-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) The Prime Minister, on the sidelines of 13th SAARC Summit in Dhaka on 12-13th November, 2005, met the King of Nepal, the Presidents of Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan.

(b) The Prime Minister reiterated to the King of Nepal the importance of restoring multi-party democracy in Nepal as early as possible and the need to take concrete steps in this regard. The Prime Minister emphasized that this would not be possible without the involvement of political parties. The King of Nepal conveyed to the Prime Minister that he remained committed to multi-party democracy and recognized that this would not be possible without involvement of political parties. He said he was prepared to take steps to bring about the restoration of multi-party democracy with the involvement of political parties as early as possible.

The Talks with Maldives covered discussions on existing areas of bilateral cooperation and also India's assistance to maldives in meeting its post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation programme.

The Talks with Sri Lanka focused on ways and means of further strentgthening bilateral cooperation.

The Talks with Bangladesh focused on issues relating to Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs), transit, energy and water resources.

During the Talks with Bhutan, both sides expressed deep satisfaction on the excellent state of relations and committed themselves to the further strengthening of the relationship.